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REPORT ON THE HALIFAX JAMAICA WOMEN'S EXCHANGE PROJECT

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Thanks to Red Herring Books, Four the Moment and the National Film Board for the gifts they provided.

In Jamaica, heartfelt thanks go to Peta Ann Baker, and Medlyn Philips for their hard work and dedication in organizing and keeping the project going, with humour and good grace. And many thanks to our host agencies the Mel Nathan Institute, St. Peter Claver Women's Housing Co-op, Sistren and the Women's Resource and Outreach Centre for providing a supportive and stimulating learning experience.

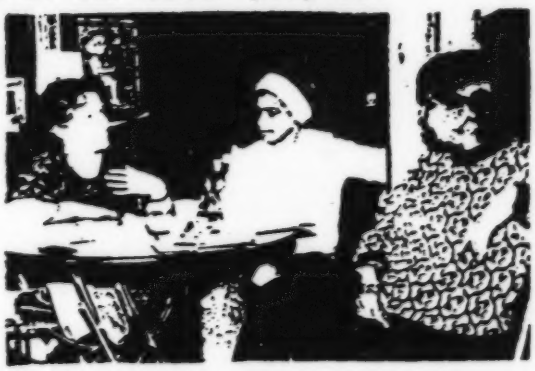
HISTORY

The idea for an exchange between Black women community activists from Halifax and Jamaica, originated at a workshop held in March 1988 on community organizing in Halifax and the Caribbean, hosted by the Centre for Caribbean Dialogue and OXFAM-Canada.

The goals of the workshop were to:

* identify the major problems and concerns of Black activists and community development workers in Halifax
* identify and analyze some obstacles to and resources for development in the Caribbean
* analyze and learn from the parallels between the Caribbean and Halifax situations
* present the situation facing Caribbean community activists using a case study
* identify any desired follow-up to the workshop.

Participants suggested that an exchange between activists from the two communities would be a useful means of developing a starting point for solidarity work; that definite connections could be made between the local struggles of communities in Canada and the struggles of Caribbean peoples.



To make this exchange a reality, a planning committee of participants was established, which identified objectives and outlined a plan. Target groups for the exchange were agreed upon and included the Tenant Association, Family Food Co-op, Parent's Rights, Black United Front and Committee Against Violence. In the Caribbean, the Jamaican Association of Development Agencies was asked to play a co-ordinating role in setting up a programme there. Oxfam staff agreed to assist with planning and logistics for the exchange. Applications from individuals active in local groups were received and selection criteria established. A proposal was sent to ADA, for discussion with host agencies there, and a timeframe for the exchange was established.

Both the workshop and exchange followed visits to the community by several Caribbean visitors, including Sistren's Popular Theatre Workshop Team and textile project co-ordinator and Leon Romeo and Carmelita Williams of the St. Vincent Union of Teachers literacy and community development programs.

Delayed for a year after Hurricane Gilbert struck the Island, the exchange took place in January 1990.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective for the exchange was to provide a forum for a sharing of experiences, and development of skills in urban community organization, between women from Black community organizations in Halifax and similar agencies in Jamaica, as well as to develop on-going mutual support links between women and groups in Halifax and Jamaica.

PREPARATION

Selection of participants involved the use of various selection models, ranging from doing individual interviews to having the applicants themselves select final participants. The end result was a combination of the two. There was a general consensus that the group, themselves, should be the ones to select, based on a set of objective criteria; in the case of difficulty, we would rely on an external group. As it turned out, an external selection team was set up to carry out the final selection, based on group recommendations and criteria that had been approved by the group.

After selection, the group met regularly at the Parent Resource Centre, to carry out planning for the project as well as do orientations, work on video, fund-raising, etc. Reading material on Jamaica, the Caribbean and women in the Caribbean were circulated amongst the group. As well, a meeting with Peta Ann Baker, ADA co-ordinator, took place in June 1989, which was very useful in terms of informing the group of what to expect in Jamaica and from the exchange, and for informing ADA about the Nova Scotian reality and participants' histories and needs, for planning in Jamaica. An orientation meeting with a local Jamaican student was also held, which was very lively, informal and provided good general information on food, climate, money, dialect, social interactions, etc.

The group agreed to produce a video that would outline the history of Blacks in the province and issues in the community here. After two video workshops with Ann Bishop, Program Co-ordinator of Community Development at Henson College, a story board and script were produced and filming done, resulting in the production of a very nice 10 minute video entitled "Black Women; We're Still Standing". As well, a copy of Black Mother Black Daughter was donated to the project by the National Film Board.

Fund-raising for this project began in earnest after we received confirmation from the Jamaican host agencies. Over two hundred local and national organizations were presented with funding proposals and participants were each responsible for raising or contributing $200 towards the costs of the project. A raffle of a Sistren wall hanging took place prior to the group's

departure. While most costs have been able to be covered by income received, a number of key contributions were not confirmed until the absolute last minute, resulting in some anxious moments for the group.

PARTICIPANTS

The group was comprised of the following five women: Verna Thomas; former staff person with the Black United Front, board member of Halifax Welfare Rights Association and chair of Preston Area Literacy Society, Valerie Carvery, former community development worker for the Regeneration of Uniacke Square, board member of Parent Resource Centre, co-founder of Concerned Citizens Against Drugs, Committee Against Violence, Public Housing Tenants Association Ward Three, Community Services Worker with the North Branch Library, Yvonne Carvery, president of Public Housing Tenants Association Ward Three, Gail Howell, member of Parents Rights Group, Carol Desmond, board member of Parent Resource Centre, member of Family Food Co-op. Members were chosen on the basis of the present and potential future involvement in community development organizations.

PROGRAMME

The group arrived in Jamaica on Thursday January 11 and left February 1. During this time, the women were involved in the activities listed below. As well, each was expected to keep a daily account of her experiences, and to participate in group meetings and evaluations. The group stayed at the Altamont Court Hotel in New Kingston, close to each of the work placements.

1. ORIENTATION - January 12-15

The group arrived in the evening of Thursday, January 11. The weekend and Monday were spent on a number of activities to introduce the group to the programme, host agencies and the Jamaican reality. Included in this was an introduction to currency and safety by Peta Ann Baker, lunch with representatives of the host group agencies, a walking tour of the area the group would be staying and working in, a bus tour of the city, and several hands on exercises on the reality of life in Jamaica.

This included being given a set amount of money, and being sent out with a list of purchases and services to obtain. Participants learnt quite graphically the seemingly insurmountable odds placed against working class Jamaicans. Sunday was spent participating in a local church service and attending a meeting of the St. Peter Claver Women's Housing Co-op, where each participant met with a small group of the co-op. Following the meeting, the group toured the housing co-op. On Monday, a meeting was held at the Women's Resource and Outreach

Centre to provide the group with a history of Jamaica, including the history of the plantation society and social, economic and political history.

2. HOST AGENCY PLACEMENTS - January 16-26

Participants were matched with host agencies, according to their interest and appropriate experience. During the placement they were responsible for assisting with the day to day work of the agency and for sharing information on their own work. The following is a list of placements and participants attachments.

Women's Resource and Outreach Centre: WROC, launched on International Women's Day in 1983 is an outreach project of the Organization of Women in Progress. The centre is guided by a board of directors, drawn from the church, teachers, trade unions, social work, media and others active in broad areas of service to women. It provides services in social counselling and referral, medical, legal advice and counselling services to women and children, education on health, consumer rights and issues affecting women and runs a thrift shop. It also organizes a hurricane reconstruction programme in Kingston and a number of rural communities. A focus of this placement was on problems faced by, and services provided to women, particularly in the area of violence.

Assignments included work on administration, a half day as medical clinic receptionist, thrift shop assistant, meeting and speaking with WROC club sisters, attending a planning meeting and a visit to Sunning Hill, St. Thomas, a rural community still suffering from the effects of Hurricane Gilbert. This visit included a meeting and presentation to the newly formed Women's Sewing Group, which is in the process of establishing a co-operative poultry raising project.

- Participants were Verna Thomas and Gail Howell

Sistren Theatre Collective: Sistren is an organization of women working for equality, social, economic and political changes for Jamaican women. Formed in 1977, it has developed many skills, ranging from administrative to design and uses a number of activities to draw attention to the struggles of women. Some of these include the Theatre Collective, which has gained international acclaim for its work, over the past 12 years. Through drama, Sistren confronts the public with issues facing women and helps to bring pressure for societal change. The group has won several major awards and has done some major touring of the Caribbean and Canada during the past few years.

The popular education programme conducts workshops on a

wide variety of themes such as unemployment and working women, unity, teenage pregnancy, sexual violence, etc. Drama, song, dance and personal testimony are linked to the workshop theme, which are followed by problem analysis and discussion of solutions.

In the textile project, screen designs are based on stories from the collecti/e theatre and Sistren's autobiographical project and printed on T-shirts, cushions, bags and wallhanging, which provide some income to the group.

The research project has done research and writing on women's work and organization in Jamaica, women's work in the sugar industry, female labour and the free trade zones, exploring women's problems through theatre, the economic crisis and prostitution and organizing women through drama in rural Jamaica.

- Verna Thomas, Gail Howell and Carol Desmond

Mel Nathan Institute: MNI is a project of the United Church of Jamaica and Grand Cayman. It originated in the inner city community of Hannah Town in Western Kingston. The MNI programme includes providing educational services through an early childhood education programme and community college; assistance with establishing community economic enterprises and community development services by working with youth and citizen's groups, especially in relation to a government-sponsored housing re-development project for the area. Participants were principally involved in the housing aspect of this project, and participated in several citizen group meetings.

Assignments at Mel Nathan were quite different than in other places; because of the shortness of staff it was quite hard to take the time of the Co-ordinator, Betty Evans. Mrs. Evans who was so informative about what goes on in the community as a whole, gave us the overview of Hanna Town where Mel Nathan is housed.

Hanna Town is a community which was forced to remove itself. They were given a specific time frame with no explanation as to why. The people coming from a poverty stricken background could not understand why the government wanted to move them. They were given promises of new houses in return of their moving off their land and out of their homes. One day the trucks came in with soldiers with guns, these people were given 2 hours to move out. With furniture and belongings in hand this community came to nought. Some people were moved in garbage trucks. This community had vegetation, and livestock.

Because the promises of houses were made by the old government, the new government feels no obligation to fulfill

these commitments. So now the houses that were started to be built are standing with no roofs. The people of Hanna Town are still fighting to get these homes finished. These people are now living in temporary accommodations which were built for them. The people are hurt and angry.

Working with this community gave us the opportunity to tell these people of a community in Halifax called Africville which had a similar experience (without guns). Sharing the Aricville experience with these people, gave them a feeling that this was not the only place these kinds of atrocities happens to people. Sharing experiences and strategies was very educational for all of us. Motivation starts from the group itself. People who are motivated can get other people motivated. The tragedy of Hanna Town and Africville is later when you have to pick up the pieces to your lives.

Mel Nathan Institute plays a very important role to the people in Hanna Town. Making statements on the political side of the Hanna Town situation has curbed any violent measures that could have erupted. They have given their wholehearted support to this community. They have sewing classes, cooking classes, woodworking shop, kindergarten - with over two hundred children. Mel Nathan is one of the most progressive groups I have seen where it is community people and not government taking on the initiative.

They have a very keen interest in the Africville situation and we are in the process of sending them information and leadership training information. This community could use workers from this area to work with them. It is most unfortunate there was not more time to work just with this group of people.

- Valerie Carvery, Yvonne Carvery

St. Peter Claver Women's Housing Co-op: St. Peter's co-op was formed by a group of women garment workers in the Kingston Free Trade Zone to begin to address their need for safe and affordable housing. They have raised money to purchase and renovate or build multi-family housing units for the members of the co-op. This is the first Women's Housing Co-op of its kind in Jamaica. Because the men were always putting the women out of their homes with their children, due to the leases being in the men's names, these women decided to take a precaution against it. There are partners in the co-op. But the houses are leased in the names of the women, protecting her and her family.

This co-op is more than just a housing co-op. This co-op has a literacy component to it, whereby the members can obtain their GED. The members of this co-op are all trained to be members in the area of their duties. These women have also a

sewing co-op started to meet the needs of an emergency fund. Because of the economy in Jamaica, people's jobs are always at stake, there being no mechanism for lay offs or sickness. The women welcomed the suggestion of using the sewing co-op to make money for this need. This fund was started up while we were in Jamaica. It was suggested by one of the members of the group. It is our hope that a partnership could be set up with this co-op and the co-ops in Canada.

- Valerie Carvery, Yvonne Carvery

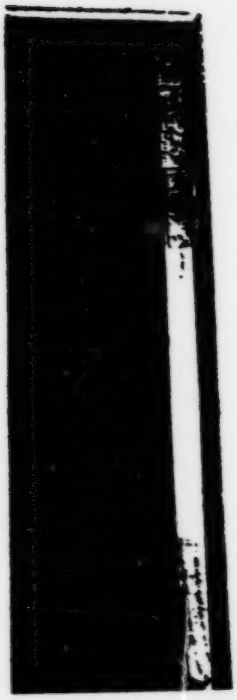
3. RURAL PROJECT VISIT - January 27-28

Visit to the Rio Grande Valley Integrated Rural Development Programme in Portland. There the group was met by about 35 women of the surrounding areas of the Grand Valley, who showed and talked about their economic development project consisting of crafts, sewing, basket making, water pipe repair and replacing road signs. The group, made up of girls and women between the ages of 12-40, talked about the mutual support system they have developed. They also did, through the Unforgettable Drama Group, a cultural dance and skits which dealt with their own personal reality of living in the Rio Grand Valley; many miles away from urban living. This group is very isolated from other women's groups. The day's activities ended with a well prepared meal of goat soup, curried mutton, rice, sugar cane and fresh fruit punch.

4. URBAN PROJECTS VISIT -January 29

Visit to the Crisis Centre for Women, a private, non-profit organization operating in Kingston since 1985. Free confidential counselling is given by professional counsellors to women and their families on matters concerning rape, incest and domestic violence. They have a 24-hour telephone service maintained by volunteers. Since 1988, the centre has provided temporary emergency housing for victims in need of this facility.

Visit to the Women's Centre Programme for Adolescent Mothers; an internationally recognized programme to deal with problems associated with early pregnancy through education and counselling, founded in 1975 and operating in five centres, island-wide. Girls up to age 16, who drop out of school due to pregnancy, are provided academic instruction. These girls are returned to the school system after the birth of their babies. Counselling sessions on parenting and community responsibilities are held with both mothers and fathers-to-be. These sessions are also geared to, and appear to be successful at motivating the girls to continue their education, improve their self-image and



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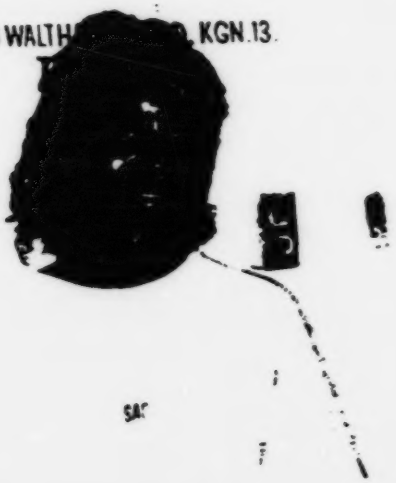

go on to become independent and confident young women. Records on low to no second pregnancies by the girls after leaving the programme are one indication of its effectiveness. Since the opening of the centre, birth to teens has steadily decreased. A video documentary on the program will be released next year.

5. WORKSHOP - January 30

A workshop entitled "Organizing Women in an Urban Setting", was organized, involving about 35 participants of host agencies and other groups, as well as the Halifax women. The focus of the workshop was on developing organizational capacity to work for community development and change, particularly in the area of leadership and participation.

6. SISTREN PLAYS

Participants attended "Buss Out", a theatre production by Sistren, at the Mavis Bank School. This was a super dramatic performance. The seven women performers left a clear and challenging message with the audience. The appeal was easily understood. Chiggerfoot Lane, the venue of the action, could be any urban or rural ghetto-type dwelling situation in Nova Scotia. The characters, a warrior and an up-town do-gooder could be any two Nova Scotia women, separated by barriers of colour and money. Buss Out was the story of not only oppressed Jamaican women, but of all oppressed women.

7. EVALUATION - January 31

A chance for the host agencies and co-ordinators, as well as the participants to evaluate the exchange.

Other activities included a trip to Port Royal, seeing areas affected by the hurricane and visiting historical sites and a museum, a visit to the Golden Age Home, the University of West Indies, Devon House, a centre for Jamaican crafts, a trip to the beach and a Jamaican style cook out with members of Sistren Theatre Collective.

Overall co-ordination of the programme was carried out by Medlyn Phillips, staff member of Projects for People, member of the ADA Management committee and participant in various programmes dealing with women's issues. The programme was set up by Peta Ann Baker of the Jamaican Association of Development Agencies.

EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Verbal and/or written evaluations and reports were done by participants since their return. The following come from these reports. Everyone agreed that the project, while at times

difficult due to problems within the group, provided a new, rich and stimulating experience, one that has enriched and enhanced each individuals life, and given them a new perspective through which to view their own community and the world at large. All agreed that it was a real learning experience, well worthwhile doing though difficult, and one that will have a continued impact. We look forward to the follow-up that this project will bring about.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP

A number of initiatives have already taken place, a number are currently in the works, and we anticipate that more will emerge with time.

1. Information to community groups: The group had planned to put together a slide show for community presentations. Unfortunately, our slides were ruined. However, colour photos were taken and we are working on putting together a "photo story" on the exchange for use in presentations.

A number of presentations and requests for presentations have already been made, including three talks to the North End Women's Group, presentations to the Congress of Black Women, International Week at the Black Cultural Centre, Parent's Rights, Mothers United for Social Transformation and a workshop at Dalhousie University. An article was written by the North End News after interviews were conducted with two of the participants. A "Jamaica Night" at the North End Library is being planned, and we anticipate that requests for presentations will continue to be made.

2. On-going links with Jamaican groups: Several areas seem to have made a particular impact which would be worthwhile following up on. These involve continued learning by Canadian participants and Jamaican participants on a number of areas of key concern.

In Jamaica, there was a key interest in learning more about housing and community organizing organizing issues through the relocation of Africville. Residents of Hanna Town, who have been facing a situation that is amazingly similar, differing mainly in the amount and type of force that was used to evict them from their community were particularly interested in this. Mrs. Carvery and Valerie will follow this up with sending written and video material on Africville, as well as on community organizing in general, to the groups interested. As well, OXFAM-DEVERIC is inviting a member of the Hanna Town community here, to spend more time studying the history, lessons from and aftermath of the Africville relocation, and to participate in a community workshop on community relocation, being held in conjunction with a visitor involved in fighting removals in South Africa.

Participants were very impressed with the work of the Teenage Mother's Centre, and hope to follow up on this. Teenage pregnancy and its attendant social problems has been a problem that has been discussed in our society for years. Members of the group feel that the establishment of a similar kind of centre in this area would have a positive effect on these problems. A suggestion has been made to organize a return visit to Jamaica to study in more depth, how this centre was established and is run. In the short run, we can also purchase a copy of the video on the centre that will be released next year.

There is an opportunity to work with the women of St. Peter Claver Housing Co-op in supporting their emergency fund through the marketing of their handbags and crafts. Valerie will stay in touch with the women on this and hopes to receive her first shipment this spring. As well, we have contacted all the housing co-ops in the province to see if there is any interest in purchasing copies of the women's video produced by St. Peter Claver's. A supporting article will be appearing in an upcoming issue of Co-op News.

The group will be meeting shortly to discuss these and other follow-up ideas.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS ON EXCHANGES IN GENERAL

1. It was felt that this was an invaluable learning experience, that should be repeated. However, in future, more attention should be paid to selecting a group that will work well together as a group and with their host agencies.

2. Some participants felt they could have been better prepared to do presentations on their own groups. Rather than simply leaving it up to individual participants to prepare presentations on their own work, we would recommend that each person do a practice presentation with the group before leaving.

3. While we had some information on the Jamaican groups before departing, had we known more about them in advance, we would have been able to bring along more specific information regarding their areas of interest (ie we could have brought videos on Africville).

4. It was felt that expectations of participants during the exchange were not laid out clearly enough. A suggestion for future, would be to state these expectations clearly and in writing beforehand, in the form of a "contract", which participants would sign and agree to, being asked to leave if the contract is broken.

BUDGET

Income:

United Church Inner City Ministry	$2500	
Oxfam-Canada	$2000	
CMHC	$2000	
Interpares	$2000	
PLURA	$1500	(anticipated)
Sisters of Charity	$1000	
Participants' contribution	$1000	
Primates Fund	$800	
CCIC	$500	
Parent Resource Centre	$250	
Cuso	$200	
Parent's Rights Group	$100	
North End Community Clinic	$100	
Hfx. Resource Development Assoc.	$50	
Total	$14,000	

Expenses:

Airfare & insurance	$3135	
Child Care	$2650	
Costs in Jamaica	$7828	
(We have not received yet the exact breakdown of how this was allocated. The following are based on budgetted (anticipated) expenses on the ground.		
-lodging & food @ $38/day	$3990	
-airport tax	$90	
-rural visit (food, lodging, transport, etc.)	$893	
-perdiem lunch, etc @5/day	$556	
-workshop costs	$357	
-organizer & admin (ADA)	$983	
-resource persons	$393	
-medical services retainer	$134	
-contingency	$428)	
Gifts (tapes)	$24	
Toronto stopover (hotel, taxis, etc)	$193	
Rolls of slides	$123	
Photo finishing	$57	
Video tape purchase & reproduction	$50	
Report	$35	
Total	$14,095	

Notes to the budget:

1. This covers childcare costs for children or grandchildren living with the participants. Four had been budgetted for but five required some support, by the time the project took place.

2. Costs in Jamaica were higher than anticipated. This was due in part to the dramatic escalation in costs there since the project was planned, and in part due to late arrival of a more comprehensive budget from organizers in Jamaica.

3. This figure may change slightly when all bills are in, but should be fairly accurate. Costs for follow-up to this project (ie production of materials, reciprocal exchange, etc) will be covered by grants or fund-raising specifically for this purpose.

Inkind contributions:

This project could not have taken place without the generous in kind contributions, not reflected in the budget, made by numerous individuals and groups.

The project's production of the video "We're Still Standing" was carried out at no cost to the project due to the donation of services, material and time by the groups previously mentioned. Regular meeting space and child care was contributed by the Parent Resource Centre. OXFAM-Canada provided the services of staff for organization of the project, as well as covering administrative expenses (phone, copying, etc.) in Canada. Administrative and organizing costs in Jamaica were subsidized through ADA's employment of the below-bottom-end of their sliding scale fees.

A value figure cannot be placed on the time and services of many people in Jamaica and Nova Scotia, who contributed in some way to this project.

Soaking up more than the sun

Contributed Photo

On their way to Jamaica, (back) Yvonne Carvery, Verna Thomas, Valerie Carvery, (front) Gail Howell and Carol Desmond wait in the Halifax airport for their flight down south.

by Susan Corkum

After spending three weeks in Jamaica exchanging information and experiences on community organization, five north-end women have returned home with a better appreciation of what they have in Canada and great admiration for their partners in the Caribbean.

The women – Valerie Carvery, Yvonne Carvery, Carol Desmond, Gail Howell and Verna Thomas – arrived home Feb. 2 after a three-week trip that took two years to organize.

The group became interested in making the trip in 1988 after attending a Caribbean Dialogue workshop led by some visiting Jamaicans at the Cornwallis Street Church.

Verna Thomas, who praised the trip as "a real learning experience," explains that the group wanted to see how Jamaicans handle problems similar to their own: inadequate housing, unemployment and low education.

"We wanted to go there and get a real sense of the struggle," adds Valerie Carvery.

The women started the process by approaching Oxfam and contacting the co-ordinator of the Association of Development Agencies (ADA) in Jamaica.

The five women, all of whom are involved in community organizing, housing and income-generating projects in the north end, raised more than $10,000 to pay for the trip.

"We wrote to everyone interested in social justice and change," says Carvery, "and everyone approached was excellent. We owe them a big thanks. They made it possible."

The women left Halifax Jan. 11 for New Kingston, Jamaica and were placed with social agencies, allowing them a closer look at the area's problems and more contact with its people.

Carvery calls the Melnathan Institute, where she was assigned, the most progressive institute she's ever seen.

"The city of Halifax could take lessons from it," she says.

The institute is much like the Nova Scotia Institute of Technology (NSIT), she says, but is not government-funded and is open to everyone. She also worked with the St. Peter Claver Women's Housing Co-op.

Thomas, who worked with a theatre group and at a women's clinic, says she was amazed at the high cost of everything.

"I can't understand how they afford to eat."

Carvery agrees, saying, "The whole trip made me appreciate many many things. Canada has too much."

Both women brought back personal projects they want to start here. Verna Thomas would like to start a counselling program for young unwed mothers, and Carvery, inspired by the sewing she saw, would like to start a young girls' sewing club.